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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 11248

E. O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: ISRAELI REACTION TO THE KNESSET DEBATE

REF.: TEL AVIV 11192

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELIS REMAIN CONCERNED ABOUT THREE ASPECTS
OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS--THE WEST BANK, WHERE THEY SEE
THE NEED FOR A LINK WITH JORDAN; THE SINAI, WHERE THEY
FEEL BEGIN HAS GIVEN TOO MUCH TOO QUICKLY; AND THE FUTURE
OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS, WHICH THEY SEE THREATENED BY
THE PROPOSAL FOR ARAB SELF-RULE. THERE IS A FEELING
THAT, TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN USUAL, MKS SPOKE FOR
THE MAN IN THE STREET DURING YESTERDAY'S DEBATE. THERE
CONTINUES TO BE OPTIMISM ABOUT THE COURSE OF NEGO-
TIATIONS, COUPLED WITH AN AWARENESS OF DIFFICULT NEGO-
TIATIONS AHEAD. MILITARY REACTION APPEARS MIXED AND
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INCONCLUSIVE. MOST BUSINESSMEN CONTINUE TO BE OPTIMISTIC
AND FORESEE AN ECONOMIC BOOM. END SUMMARY

2. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH A NUMBER OF ISRAELIS, WE HAVE
BEEN TOLD THAT TO A MUCH GREATER EXTENT THAN IS USUALLY
THE CASE, MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET IN THEIR DEBATE YESTERDAY
EXPRESSED THE VIEWS OF THE MAN IN THE STREET. THERE IS GENERAL

SUPPORT FOR AND TRUST IN THE PRIME MINISTER, ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE FEEL THAT THE PACE OF EVENTS IS TOO SWIFT AND TOO PUBLIC: "THE ISRAELI PUBLIC NEEDS TIME TO DIGEST THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE." THERE CONTINUES TO BE A SENSE OF OPTIMISM AND A FEELING THAT THE PEACE PROCESS CANNOT BE REVERSED. THE MOST PESSIMISTIC PREDICTIONS NOW APPEAR TO BE CONCERNED ONLY WITH THE PACE OF THE MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE, NOT WHETHER THAT MOVEMENT WILL BE STALLED OR REVERSED. HOWEVER, WE ARE TOLD THAT THE MKS ALSO EXPRESSED THE VIEWS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN THEIR FEELING THAT BEGIN WOULD BE IN FOR A HARD TIME IF HE MOVES FURTHER WITHOUT SOME COMPENSATING MOVES FROM SADAT.

3. ISRAELI COMMENTS ABOUT THE SPECIFICS OF BEGIN'S PLAN FOCUS ON THREE AREAS: THE WEST BANK, SINAI, AND ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE TERRITORIES. A NUMBER OF ISRAELIS HAVE EXPRESSED TO US THEIR CONCERN THAT ANY ARRANGEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK MUST INCLUDE AN ACCOMMODATION WITH JORDAN. THIS IS THE ONLY SOLUTION WHICH WILL AVOID AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE. THEY ASK WHETHER AUTONOMY MEANS THAT ARABS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD--INCLUDING ARAFAT AND HIS SUPPORTERS--WILL BE FREE TO COME AND SETTLE THERE. THEY ALSO ASK WHETHER HUSSEIN CAN BE PERSUADED TO BE A PARTNER IN A WEST BANK SOLUTION. THEY COMMENT THAT ANY JEW

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WOULD BE CRAZY TO REMAIN IN THE WEST BANK UNDER ARAB RULE.

4. THERE IS WIDE-SPREAD CONVICTION THAT IN THE SINAI BEGIN HAS GIVEN TOO MUCH TOO QUICKLY, BECAUSE OF WORLD EXPECTATION AND PRESSURE, ALTHOUGH WHAT HE HAS OFFERED WOULD BE AN ACCEPTABLE PRICE FOR A FULL PEACE TREATY WITH EGYPT. VIEWS ARE MIXED REGARDING THE MILITARY AND THE POLITICAL VALUE OF THE SINAI: THE DESERT, EVEN IF DEMILITARIZED, IS ONLY A QUALIFIED BARRIER AGAINST A RENEWED EGYPTIAN ATTACK. POLITICALLY, THE SINAI SHOULD HAVE BEEN USED AS A BARGAINING CARD TO GAIN APPROVAL FOR ISRAEL'S WEST BANK POLICIES.

5. ON THE QUESTION OF SETTLEMENTS, THERE IS NOW SOME THOUGHT THAT SETTLEMENTS SHOULD PERHAPS NEVER HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED, GIVEN THE INDEFINITE STATUS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. ISRAELIS SAY THAT THEY WOULD NOT WANT THEIR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN JEWISH SETTLEMENTS OUTSIDE ISRAEL'S BORDERS AND THAT THE PURPOSE OF SETTLEMENTS SHOULD HAVE BEEN TO BUILD A BETTER ISRAEL.

6. A GROUP OF SENIOR PROFESSORS TO WHOM WE SPOKE AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF TEL AVIV WERE CONVINCED THAT BEGIN'S POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THIS COUNTRY IS SO STRONG THAT HE CAN GET AWAY WITH ALMOST ANY POLITICAL DECISION. FOR EXAMPLE, HE HAD AGREED TO A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES WITH SADAT WHICH INCLUDED THE BUZZ PHRASE "SELF-DETERMINATION" FOR THE WEST BANKERS, HE COULD HAVE CARRIED THE COUNTRY WITH HIM (ALTHOUGH THEY ADMITTED HE WOULD HAVE HAD VERY TOUGH SLEDDING IN THE PROCESS). THESE SAME PROFESSORS TOLD US THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GENERALIZE THE ATTITUDE OF THEIR STUDENTS; TO MOST STUDENTS, PEACE SEEMS TO MEAN LITTLE MORE THAN A LIFTING OF ISRAEL'S ISOLATION WITH A POSSIBILITY OF VISITS TO CAIRO.

7. A MEMBER OF THE KNESSET, AKIVA NOF OF THE DMC, SAID TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT ONE OF THE MOST TROUBLING ASPECTS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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BEGIN'S PLAN--APART FROM ITS HAVING BEEN SERVED UP TO THE KNESSET WITHOUT CONSULTATION--IS THE OFFER OF ISRAELI CITIZENSHIP TO THE ARAB RESIDENTS OF THE TERRITORIES. THIS HAS LONG-RUN IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND ITS DEMOGRAPHY. NOF COMMENTED THAT BEGIN HAD CLEARLY EXPECTED A SOMEWHAT HIGHER AFFIRMATIVE APPROACH IN YESTERDAY'S KNESSET SESSION AND SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN VISIBLY DISAPPOINTED WHEN THE VOTE RESULT WAS ANNOUNCED. HE ALSO TOLD US THAT HE FELT BEGIN HAS GONE AS ABOUT AS FAR AS HE CAN GO AT THE PRESENT TIME.

8. INITIAL MILITARY REACTION, BASED ON A SMALL SAMPLE OF OFFICERS RANGING FROM CAPTAIN TO BRIGADIER GENERAL, IS MIXED AND INCONCLUSIVE. SOME FEEL THAT BEGIN'S PLAN IS UNREALISTIC, ALTHOUGH THEY GIVE NO CLEAR REASON FOR WHY THEY BELIEVE THIS. THERE IS GENERAL UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT AN AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT WOULD MEAN TO THE IDF. WE DISCERN A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESERVISTS AND REGULARS, WITH THE FORMER SUPPORTING A WITHDRAWAL FROM "EMPTY SANDS" PROVIDED IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY DEMILITARIZATION; REGULARS ARE MORE CONCERNED THAT "ISRAEL IS GIVING UP EVERYTHING WHILE EGYPT GIVES UP NOTHING".

9. SOME MILITARY OFFICERS QUESTION THE ROLE OF THE IDF IN THE WITHDRAWAL/AGREEMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESS BECAUSE OF CHIEF OF STAFF GUR'S NON-INVOLVEMENT. SOME OFFICERS BELIEVE MAJOR GENERAL SHAFIR'S STAR IS RISING BECAUSE HE IS INCLUDED IN WEIZMAN'S NEGOTIATING GROUP. WE EVALUATE SHAFIR'S INVOLVEMENT AS NATURAL, IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE MILITARY DISCUSSIONS ARE FOCUSED ON THE SINAI AND HE IS THE COMMANDER OF THAT AREA.

10. MOST BUSINESSMEN AND PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT. HEY ADMIT THAT THERE WILL BE DIFFICULTIES ON SPECIFIC POINTS, BUT THEY SEEM NOT TO HAVE FOCUSED ON THOSE PARTICULAR DIFFICULTIES. THEIR OPTIMISM IS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT THE MAIN BARRIER TO PEACE WAS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOCK WHICH SADAT BROKE WITH HIS TRIP TO JERUSALEM. AS ONE BUSINESSMAN COMMENTED THIS MORNING, "WITH THE SADAT TRIP, WE ARE OVER THE HUMP." SOME OF THIS OPTIMISM MAY REFLECT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF WISHFUL THINKING, INASMUCH AS MOST BUSINESSMEN ASSUME THAT PEACE WITH EGYPT WILL BRING ABOUT AN ECONOMIC BOOM WITHIN ISRAEL AND IN THEIR DESIRE TO SEE THIS OCCUR, THEY MAY NOT BE THINKING TOO MUCH ABOUT THE SPECIFIC DETAILS OF NEGOTIATIONS. LEWIS UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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